

*By Bill Guertin*

*The 800-Pound Gorilla*

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## *The Words We Choose*

It was the beginning of a normal school day, just like any other. The 6<sup>th</sup> grade class was just getting its science books out. St. Martin's School had two 6<sup>th</sup>-grade classes, and Mrs. Brock's class started each day with science.

Just as she was about to begin, the school principal came on the loudspeaker:

"Teachers, please pardon this interruption, but it looks as though our plans have fallen through. We won't be taking the school to the movie theatre to see Jonathan Livingston Seagull today as we had planned. Please continue with your normal day in your classrooms. Thank you."

The students looked at each other in shock and anger. "What?" they said. And then, to Mrs. Brock: "You were going to bring us to see a MOVIE today?" The class was up in arms. "I can't believe it! What a ripoff!" they all said, to each other and no one in particular.

One boy, however, said nothing. He looked around at everyone for a moment, tried to understand what they were saying, and then said what he was thinking.

"What are you all complaining about?" he said over the group. "We didn't lose anything. The school tried to do something nice for us, and it didn't work. We should be thankful that they tried at all."

Mrs. Brock was the only one that heard the boy. She quieted the class, and motioned to him. "Bill, say again what you just said."

Bill was surprised that she had asked him to repeat it. In a more timid voice, he said, "I just said that we shouldn't be complaining about something we never had in the first place."

Mrs. Brock's normally fiery temperament became unusually warm and kind. "That's right, Bill. That's right. I want everyone in this room to take note. What Bill just said is one of the brightest things I have ever heard in this classroom."

It was a moment that changed the boy's life forever.

Never had he been singled out as saying something that bright before. Never had he been complimented so sincerely from a teacher he had respected—and feared-- so deeply.

From that day on, he was less afraid to stand up and speak out about how he felt about things.

And today, that boy speaks a whole lot.

I know. Because that 11-year-old boy was me.

Today I speak at functions large and small about inspiring others, serving others, and helping others to sell. I have had many positive influences in my life, but that one moment in 6<sup>th</sup> grade is permanently etched in my mind.

My guess is that most of the kids in that class don't even remember that happening at all. It's a day I'll never forget.

What days stand out in your mind? Was there something said in your direction that changed your life forever?

The truth is that there are many powerful, memorable moments that happen just like that in our work lives.

We can say things to others that will instill that kind of pride in those we work with each day. It doesn't have to be the boss. We all have opportunities to build people up around us, but sometimes we choose to tear them down with caustic words, insensitive body language, or deaf ears.

All of us secretly want to be recognized for making a difference, for being special. It's a fact that those who are recognized positively at work are happier, more productive, and stay longer on the job.

As a manager, your words are being carefully measured by those you supervise. Indeed, imagine for a moment that every conversation you have with someone is like handing them a rock or a flower. Which are you choosing to give to others? How many rocks are you handing out? How many flowers?

It doesn't take long for someone to grow tired of accepting rocks from someone else. Their arms grow tired of holding them, and they might just throw them back at you.

Flowers given in the form of compliments, kudos, or acknowledgements can literally make someone's day, and a whole bouquet of them can inspire individuals or groups to consistent peak performance.

Remember how powerful your words can be. The next conversation you have may stick with someone for the rest of their lives.

*Bill Guertin is Chief Enthusiasm Officer of [The 800-Pound Gorilla](#), a training and business development firm in Bourbonnais specializing in sales performance, customer service, and marketing. He can be reached at [bill@The800PoundGorilla.com](mailto:bill@The800PoundGorilla.com), or at (815) 932-5878.*